

Jewel Cave National Monument 11149 US Hwy 16 Building B12 Custer, SD 57730 605-673-8300 phone 605-673-8397 fax

## **Jewel Cave National Monument News Release**

Release Date: October 29, 2010

For Immediate Release

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## Jewel Cave National Monument Temporarily Closes Cave for Tours

Custer – Jewel Cave National Monument has temporarily closed the cave for public tours until further notice, due to technical difficulties with the elevator system. Two elevators serve as the primary transportation mode into the cave resource, and all staff and visitors access the cave using this system. The elevators are currently off-line and are not available for use.

The elevator maintenance crew under contract has been contacted to inspect the system and make the necessary repairs. There is no set timeline for this maintenance action, other than the Monument is expecting to have the elevators operational in the near future. Superintendent Larry Johnson states, "At the present time, we are unsure of the mechanical issues that have caused the elevators to go off-line. For the safety of our visitors and staff, the elevators have been shut down until further notice."

The Monument also has an emergency cave lighting system for times when power outages take place, such as during electrical storms and downed trees. During a recent internal test, the emergency lighting system did not fully work within the cave. Johnson further comments, "The reason for performing routine tests is to ensure that safety equipment is properly working at all times. This is an excellent example of an issue that was readily identified during a test and requires immediate attention. Granted, Monument staff carry extra light sources on each public tour, such as flashlights. Nonetheless, the Monument will not compromise the safety of its visitors or staff, simply to allow access to the resource."

The visitor center and elevators were constructed and installed at the Monument between 1970 and 1972. The opening day of the facilities took place on May 28, 1972. The elevators are 38 years old; however, they continue to provide service for the Monument on a daily basis. Even under daily usage, the elevators are considered commercial grade and are meant for constant visitor traffic. Johnson states, "The elevators appear to be safe, yet the staff has had to reset the system more this year than past summer seasons. To ensure that everything is working properly, we are moving forward with a more detailed inspection and repair of the overall system."

Jewel Cave National Monument is open year round, except for Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Years Day. The visitor center and surface resources continue to be available for visitor use. The facilities are open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with park rangers available for visitor questions. To learn more about the Monument, call the visitor center at 605-673-8300 and select Option 2. Monument information can also be accessed online at www.nps.gov/jeca.